

LIBERTY. ¹³

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SERMON

PREACH'D in the

Cathedral Church

OF

St. PETER EXON.

ON

THURSDAY, Sept. 16. 1731.

BEFORE THE

GENTLEMEN educated in the Free-
School of *Exeter*, under the Reverend
Mr. REYNOLDS.

By ZACH. MUDGE, Vicar of
Abbotskam, Devon.

Publish'd at the Request of the Stewards.

L O N D O N :

Printed for S. BIRT, at the *Bible and Ball* in
Ave-Mary-Lane; and E. SCORR, over-against the
Guild-Hall in *Exeter*. M.DCC.XXXI.

THE

MEMORIAL

CATHEDRAL CHURCH

OF THE

PROTESTANT

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DIocese

OF THE

UNITED STATES

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Sir Wil. Courtenay Bart.

Rev. Dr. Bertie,

Sir Wil. Yonge Bart.

Rev. Dr. Fleetwood,

Thomas Carew Esq;

John Rolle Esq;

Alderman Hickman,

Alderman Buffel,

STEWARDS,

THIS DISCOURSE

Is humbly offer'd by

Their most Obedient

Humble Servant,

Zach. Mudge,

Nach Mudge.

Humble Servant,

Their most Obedient

Is humbly offered by

THE DISCOURSE

STEWARDS

Albeman Balfour,
Albeman Hickman,
John Rolfe Esq,
Thomas Carow Esq,
Rev. Dr. Fleetwood,
Sir Will. Yonge Bart.
Rev. Dr. Berris,
Sir Will. Courtenay Bart.

T O

I Pet. ii. 16.

*As free, and not using your Liberty
for a Cloak of Maliciousness,
but as the Servants of God.*

THE Christian Religion is represented to us in the Holy Scriptures with every Advantage that can make it truly valuable and worthy of all Acceptation; Among others this of Liberty is frequently insisted on by Christ and his Apostles: And they could not represent it under any Notion more pleasing, But yet as there is something enchanting in the Sound, where this undoubted Privilege of all Christians is ever so strongly asserted or supposed, we are frequently caution'd against the Abuse of it. Thus St. Paul to the Galatians, *You have been called, Brethren, says he, to Liberty; only use not Liberty for an Occasion to the Flesh:* And St. Peter in the Words of the Text, *Free, yet not using your Liberty for a Cloak of Maliciousness, but as the Servants of God.* And this same Apostle, by the Time he wrote his second Epistle had lived long enough to see some gross Abuses of this Doctrine, where he speaks of those who promised Liberty, but were themselves the Slaves of Corruption.

IN the Verses just before my Text, the Apostle had been pressing Obedience to Authority; this join'd to the Usage of the Original Word *κατα* in the sacred Writings, makes it reasonable to suppose that he here particularly intends those who might make a wrong Use of Liberty to cover a Spirit of Maliciousness, Envy, Ill-Nature and Contradiction

tradiction to Government: a Corruption naturally enough arising from the first Appearance of Liberty, which seems to promise Independency and Exemption from all Rule. But this Mistake the Apostle wisely corrects by this Consideration, that we are still the Servants of God; no Liberty can discharge us from his Service, nor consequently from a Subjection to every Ordinance of Man for the Lord's Sake, whose Ordinances in the last Result of Things they really are; and for the same Reason are the Laws of Virtue and Morality still as binding as ever, nor have we any Licence to indulge the Flesh and its Appetites; for the Laws of Virtue are the Laws of God, and we are his Servants. The same will hold good in any Instance of Duty whatever, that we are still bound by the Service which we owe to God to submit to it. This is the Apostle's Reasoning, according to which the Service of God might seem at first sight, of all others, the strictest Bondage, and most opposite to the common Notions of Liberty; and yet at the same time he supposes us free, and every Deviation from this Service not to be Liberty, but Vice and Servitude usurping that Name. As it is therefore a Point of considerable Importance in Reason and Divinity, to give it what Light I can, I shall (1st) enquire into the true Nature of Liberty, in order to prove that it is not another Thing from the Service of God.

(2^d) SHEW that God has most effectually provided for the Liberty of Man by the Dispensation of the Gospel; and,

Lastly, POINT out some of the Abuses which have arisen from a Liberty ill understood, and wrong applied to countenance real Slavery, a corrupted Mind and Heart. Under one or other of these Heads will, I think, be comprehended the whole Force of the Doctrine deliver'd by St. Peter in the Words of my Text; *As free, and not using*
your

your Liberty for a Cloak of Maliciousness, but as the Servants of God.

First, I am to enquire into the true Nature of Liberty. Under Liberty I comprehend that of the Thought as well as the outward Action; and indeed as all the Motives to Action are supplied from the Thought, from our own Reason or Sense (which I shall frequently call by the general Name of Understanding;) from our own Understanding, I say, or from a Faith in the Understanding of others, from Love or Hatred, Hopes or Fears, &c. *i. e.* from Thought of one kind or other, a Liberty of Thought will of course draw the other after it, and may therefore in Reasoning safely enough stand for them both.

Now in the first Place no considering Man, I suppose, will claim such a Liberty whereby he shall be able to deny his Consent to the clearest Evidence of Reason, the most unexceptionable Testimony of Sense or Faith, and the strongest Motives of Action; insomuch that where a Thing is proved true, he shall be free still to think it false, in opposition to his own Lights; to disbelieve a Thing which to himself carries every Appearance of Credit; to do this when every Motive of Action determines him to do the contrary. One can hardly express this so gently but the Contradiction shews itself through it; for it would be really to judge against his own Judgment, to believe against his own Belief, and to do that which he cannot do. Such a whimsical Liberty, if there be any such, is certainly no Privilege to human Nature, much less is it that which our blessed Redeemer has purchased for us. It is true that we frequently judge amiss, believe and act wrong, but still it is always conformably to our own Reasons and Motives: Nor is this any Imperfection in our Nature that we are obliged to conclude rightly from our own Reasons, to act consistently with our own Motives; far from it:

But

But here lies our Misfortune, that we either don't know or don't attend to other greater Reasons and more prevailing Motives, which would lead us another Way.

NOR therefore can Liberty consist in a perpetual Suspension of the Mind where the Soul feels itself equally balanced, and indifferent to this or that Judgment, to this Action or the contrary. Something like this hath been advanc'd in Philosophy and elsewhere, but ever very unhappily, and in the utmost defiance to Nature and right Reason. Sometimes we find ourselves mistaken in our Conclusions, our Senses frequently have misrepresented Things, we have believed and been deceived, our Passions have misled us. All this is true; but our Reason, our Sense, our Faith, our Passions, are they therefore to be wholly discarded? or, which comes to the same, must not we, for fear of being deceiv'd, ever venture to give them any Trust? If this Reasoning be right, the Administration of God from the Beginning of the World to this Day hath been wrong; for Mankind has ever trusted them, and by this Trust have all the great Ends of Providence been carried on. They have sometimes been misled by them, and from thence the World has rightly concluded that they are not to be absolutely trusted: For every Instance of Deception there is naturally an Allowance given, and a Drawback made upon that Fulness of Assent; it puts a Weight into the opposite Scale: But it ought not therefore to overcome or equal the weightier Truth that lies on the other Side. As well might we say that an Ounce ought to counterpoise a Pound, or that ten should be no more than one.

THE Inclination therefore of the Soul to close with an Object offer'd to it ought not to be always balanced, but, as it is, always check'd by the Error on the other Side, in exact Proportion to its Moment. And so little Reason have we
upon

upon the account of some accidental Mistakes, to mistrust the Truth of the Faculties themselves, that one great Way of discovering and correcting an Error is from the superior Truth of them: We know that we see sometimes wrong, because we generally see right.

SOMETIMES indeed the Mind ought to be suspended, and there the Wisdom of God has provided it shall be so; as where the Object is at a Distance, and half out of Sight: And thus the Reason and the Faith have their Bounds, at the Extremities of which Things appear obscure and confused. But because the Eye cannot clearly discern a Man a great way off, must I therefore doubt the Existence of a Precipice just before my Feet? Because I know not what to believe of an antient Fact obscurely mention'd, and without any Consequence, must I therefore preserve myself suspended in a Matter of the utmost Moment, and which has left behind it the deepest Traces? In Things uncertain and of little Importance it is ridiculous to be positive; but in Things of the greatest Importance and the highest Certainty, it is not only ridiculous, but fatal to be doubtful. If there were no Medium to be chosen, but we must either be always positive or doubtful in every Thing, it were better to be exposed to Ridicule than to Ruin; and this we should soon perceive, did we once feel the distracted and forlorn State of an everlasting Perplexity. This, as the greatest of all Evils, Nature has strongly guarded against, but yet is sometimes felt by some dark unhappy Souls. But if this be Liberty, Demonstration is the greatest Enslaver in the World; for that absolutely determines the Mind to one Point, and leaves no Power to doubt, *i. e.* as the Reason is more perfected, so the Mind is more enslaved, and perfect Knowledge (such as we conceive to be in the Deity) is absolute Slavery.

THIS therefore not being the Liberty which we are seeking after, we must enquire farther. Is it then a Power to think and act for ourselves without any Interposition from abroad? a Right to yield to no Reasons or Motives but those of our own Growth? Where there is infinite Knowledge, and nothing wanting upon which a Judgment may be form'd, there evidently the Mind is qualified to judge for itself: Where all possible Motives that ought to determine an Action have their just Weight, there the Action ought to be perfectly free and uncontroul'd, *i. e.* to a Perfection of Nature there is, there must be, there ought to be, no foreign Controul or Influence. This Liberty is the Prerogative of God; but where the Mind, such as is the human, is bounded within a narrow Compass, and consequently every Judgment and every Action want infinite Things to give them Perfection, it is evident that the Mind must want so much Right to this Liberty as it wants Perfection; And who can tell us how large is that dark Chasm of the Soul? what Reasons lie conceal'd in that vast Region where we know nothing?

WELL then, since our Understanding is of itself bounded, could it by any means be enlarged, would the Man lose so much Liberty as he has gained Improvement? is he less free to think for himself as he has received a larger Influx of Knowledge from abroad? no, thus far, considering that all this Knowledge thus transplanted into him is as it were naturalized and blended with his original self, he owns no Master, and his Thoughts are his own: perhaps he'll acknowledge himself more free as he is less confined, and a great deal may be done this way towards enlarging the Understanding and the Liberty of Man. Great are the Benefits of Company, Books, Discourses: vast is the Advantage we receive from a liberal Education, which opens to us a

new World of Men and Things: how much do we owe to the Address of a skilful Master, who with a fine Hand forms the tender Soul, dextrously delivers the labouring Youth of his own Notions, is ever insinuating and distilling something from himself, and sows those Seeds of Knowledge in the Mind, which, when long after they are grown to Perfection, sometimes make the vain Man proud of himself, and able to despise the Hand from whence they came? To say all, our excellent Constitution, the common Mother that first bore us, and has since fed us, to whose wise Provision we are indebted for these and all other Advantages, how much of us may she justly claim? Were we to see the Nakedness of that Mind which was stripp'd of all those foreign Assistances, and left barely to his own Acquirements, it would teach us to think Modestly of ourselves, and with all Respect and Gratitude of others. — But it may be we are sensible of this; we would gladly accept to have our Understanding improved, and our Eyes open'd thro' all this infinite Complication of Things, that we might be as Gods, every one for himself able infallibly to discern Good and Evil. This is what the Pride of Man hath been ever aiming at, but in vain; for we can no more be made Gods than be born so. There are established Bounds, beyond which the utmost Improvement cannot carry us; there will be still beyond all the Knowledge we can possess, infinite Room for Ignorance, and consequently a great Void unprovided for: however, after all, if Man can go no further, we must make the best Use of what can be had, and Liberty will consist in doing as we can, and judging as we are able from our own Abilities, improved by the best Instruction.

BUT suppose that were I can see nothing myself, there another shall see something which con-

cerns me; shall I, because by the Supposition I can't be made to see it with my own Eyes, shall I therefore stily maintain my Liberty of seeing for myself, and refuse his Assistance? this is in some Degree the Case of every two Men in the World, where the Capacity is upon the whole equal, yet from a different Position of the Understanding they shall either see what the other cannot. Where there is a Difference in Men, this will create a proportionable Difference on either Side in the Reasoning, but we'll now suppose them nearly on a Level, none to understand perfectly, and yet every one to see something, tho' with some Difference. Here it is plain that if great Regard is to be had to my Understanding, a great Regard is due to the Understanding of another; if another's have but little Weight, mine can have no more: it is so contrived, that whatever Notion we have of the Human Capacity, we can never want a Check proportion'd to it. Be the Understanding of Man ever so much magnified, we ought to magnify it alike; and not, as is often seen, say very great and magnificent Things of Reason, and in the Conclusion take the whole Benefit of it to ourselves; many times in Defiance to the Reason of the whole World. Such are in Truth pleading not for Reason, but for private Reason; and not for that neither, for every Man's is such, but for their own against that of the World and of every single Man in it. — We ought therefore, if we talk fairly and consistently, to give the same Advantage to others which we claim to ourselves, and a much greater still to the united Sense of Societies and Kingdoms of Men. And if this be true, it is right to acknowledge it for Truth, to allow it a proper Weight with us in Judgment and Practice; and hence arises a Faith which gives us all the Benefit of the Understanding of others; by our own Understanding we
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see with our own Eyes, and by a Faith in the Understanding of others, we see with the Eyes of others too: and this is a very gracious Provision which God Almighty has made to supply the necessary Deficiency of one Man out of the Abundance of many. — But others, it will be said, may deceive us. Societies of Men can no more deceive themselves, than single Persons; and therefore the Supposition is absurd of whole Communities dissembling, of all Mankind playing the Hypocrite: To whom or for what Reason should they do it? One Man indeed may deceive another, one Set or Society of Men may deceive another Set or Society; sometimes they do so; and this, as I said before, will require an Abatement to be made; which accordingly the World makes, without destroying the Truth of Faith, and the Advantage to be had from it: an Advantage so great that the good of all Society and Government depends upon it. For if Mankind in forming Societies were supposed to club together in creating a prodigious Power only, and placing it somewhere without an Understanding proportioned to it, Government would be a greater Monster than any that the Poets talk of, an enormous Strength join'd unnaturally to a small Understanding. But it is not so: Things are better ordered upon the whole; for I am not talking of the Corruption of particular Times: no Man can shew why a Union of Understanding should not have the same Advantage as a Union of Power. Hence it is that the Subject naturally comes into the Sense of his Superiors, to a certain Degree, as far as it is reasonable he should, and by that means enjoys the Wisdom of the Administration at the same time that he is supported by its Power. Thus, in a Father, a superior Understanding is clothed in a Portion of Power exactly suited to it; the Child, if his Soul be rightly form'd, is blest with a native Sense of his own Imperfection,

Imperfection, which wisely disposes him to submit not only his outward Behaviour, but his very Sense and Judgment to a certain Degree. The Submission of the one corresponds exactly to the Authority of the other, and the Reason for that Authority; the Laws of Family are maintain'd; Order and Harmony preserved; and the Child by this wise Conduct of Providence has all the Benefit of the greater Knowledge and Power of the Father.

It is very reasonable then, we'll now suppose, to possess a certain Degree of Faith, by which we are kindly incorporated into the general Understanding of Mankind, and enjoy the Benefit of it. But as this Faith is an Act of Obedience, whereby the Understanding of every Man does in some sort bow and pay Homage to a foreign Authority, it seems that this can't be done without Prejudice to Liberty, that native Sovereignty which we all claim over ourselves: But what then is Liberty? Is it that trifling Thing mentioned at first, a Power to be deceived, to chuse Error where Truth appears, to refuse to see a Benefit where there is one? no surely this is either not at all, or not a Privilege to be insisted on. True Liberty is not a Power to reason truly or falsely, to do right or wrong, but a Power to do right and to reason truly, when the Understanding is disencumber'd from every Cloud, and free to give to every Truth its due Moment; and, if there be a Truth and Benefit carried in Authority, we are not clogg'd by any undue Opinion of ourselves from seeing and enjoying it. Truth is the Liberty of the Mind which only can set it free.

It would be childish here to say, what yet is commonly said, that we must follow our own Judgments, we must believe and act according to our own Opinion of Things and not another's. It is childish, I say, not because it is not true, but because it is nothing to the Purpose: for he that

carries

carries the Authority of Man ever so high, even to Infallibility, still follows his own Judgment in it, it is agreeable to his Opinion to place Infallibility where he places it: But is he therefore free? yes, he is, in this Sense, in which every one must be so; he follows his own Judgment. But at the same Time his Judgment is close fetter'd, his Understanding is depress'd and overborn by the Weight of Human Authority, which he carries too high. A Man is not free therefore because he judges according to his own Reason, for this he always does when he reasons ever so absurdly; nor because he acts according to his own Motives, for this he always does when he acts ever so monstrously: but then only, as I said before, he is free to Perfection, when nothing hinders him from Judging and Acting according to Truth. I conclude therefore upon the Strength of what is past that Faith in Man, or which is the same, Submission to Authority to a certain Degree, far from enslaving the Mind, helps to set it free.

BUT still an absolute Faith and an absolute Obedience neither Father, Master, Priest, Magistrate, nor any Name of Authority upon Earth can claim, it being the Prerogative of God only, who can no more communicate such a Right, than he can communicate his own infinite Being: I mean an absolute Right without Limitation, which can be only due to Wisdom and Power without Bounds; but these Qualifications are in Man but to a certain Point only. After all the Use of our own most improved Understanding, strengthen'd by the concurrent Sense of Nations of Men, yet still the Soul requires an Assurance which nothing below God can give it. He alone that sees the Whole is capable of judging surely of any one Part, because of those infinite Relations which every single Thing bears to all others. Every Action draws its Principles from innumerable Causes, and spreads
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its Consequences in different Proportions into all Futurity; all which none but God himself sees, or is capable of seeing. In this Maze of Things, inextricable to us, would he in infinite Goodness vouchsafe to lead us by the Hand, teach us what to think and what to do, then only we might hope to find Rest to our Souls: But this cannot be done by any Application to the Understanding of Man, which, for Reasons mentioned before, is absolutely incapable of receiving it.

SUPPOSE then, that he perfectly seeing all those infinite Relations which lie dispensed over the Face of Things, and weighing their several Moments, and with divine Art compounding them together, should give us a Rule of Life which resulted from all these, and in like manner should give us the Force of all these infinite Consequences comprehended in one expressive Word of Heaven or Hell, this alone, it's evident, would fill up all our Deficiencies, and give us all the Perfection that human Nature will admit: But it is impossible to enjoy the Benefit of this divine Guidance any other Way than by Faith. We must believe (know it we cannot) that this is a most perfect Rule, and submit to be govern'd by it, or we must of Necessity forfeit all the Advantage to be received from it. To compleat the System, therefore, we must suppose it to come recommended to our Faith with such Evidences and Testimonies as are proper Grounds for it, insomuch that it shall be impossible to believe any Thing at all, consistently, without believing that; in other Words, we must renounce all Faith or have Faith in God, and this is the high Claim which our Religion makes, and from whence it necessarily follows that the Service of God is perfect Freedom; because by the Supposition above made in Acting upon this Principle, we act upon a Perfection of Reason, a Perfection of Faith, and a Perfection of every Motive that can or ought to influence us.

It is plain by this Deduction of Liberty, that were our own Understanding infinitely perfect and self-sufficient, to be wholly govern'd by that would be perfect Liberty; that Faith becomes reasonable only, as it is a Supplement to the Deficiency of our Understanding, and consequently that the Liberty which arises from Faith is only a Supplemental Liberty to remedy the Deficiency of that first and highest Liberty which belongs to God only. But as long as our Understanding is necessarily defective, so long will Faith be necessary to give us Perfection, such a Perfection as is consistent with Humanity; and so long will the Liberty of Man consist in the Obedience of a Divine Faith, or which is the same, in the Service of God.

So that now it appears, that true Liberty and the Service of God are the same Thing under two different Considerations: If you ascend from the Reason of Man, and consider the Faith and Obedience which we owe to Men within certain Bounds, and to God absolutely as reasonable Things, in this View Faith and Obedience are Points of Reason, and consequently we are govern'd by Reason only, *i.e.* we are wholly free: On the other Hand, in beginning from God and his Laws directed to the Faith, every Thing assumes another Form, comes to us under the Notion of Duty, and even the Exercise of Reason itself is bound upon us by the Authority of this supreme Law-giver, and makes Part of the Service which he requires of us. And accordingly the Holy Scriptures often direct us to consider Things in both these Views, and wisely make use of them for a Controul one upon the other. We are there taught to call Religion the Service of God, but lest that Expression should lead us to imagine in it something servile and illiberal, we are given to understand that these Servants of God are the only Men in the World that are indeed free: We are called to Liberty, but lest that Word might be dangerously interpreted to countenance Licentiousness,

ness, or Maliciousness, or Pride, &c. the Apostle happily controuls it in the Words of my Text, where we are allow'd to be free yet as the Servants of God. I come now to the

Second Thing I propos'd, which was to shew that God has most effectually provided for the Liberty of Man, by the Dispensation of the Gospel. It can't be suppos'd that in Part of a Discourse, so noble a Subject should have all its Strength; I can only have time to consider it in one Light, to which I am directed by the Account of Liberty before given. I shall compare this Foolishness of God, as the *Greeks* thought it, in applying to the Faith of Mankind, in order to procure them Liberty; I shall compare it, I say, with the Wisdom of Men, who have chosen to address themselves to the Reason. Give me leave now again to mention in gross (for I need not distinguish accurately) four Principles of Thought and Action within us; the Reason, the Sense, the Faith, and the Passions: Shall I add a Fifth, which whether indiscernibly compounded in whole or in part from a mixture of these, or whether it be something wholly inexplicable to us, operates upon us when we do Things we know not why, from a sudden Emotion or a secret Turn of Mind unknown to ourselves? This, if in a Matter of Concern, is in the Language of the *Greeks* δαιμόνιον or οἰδῶν; in the Christian Scheme, which refers every Thing to its first Principles, it is an Inspiration from God, or an Infusion of the Devil; in the gay easy Style of the World, it is Humour and Caprice, and we know not what.

I have said already that we are subject to be misled sometimes by every one of these Principles; that this requires of course some Abatement to be made in our Assent to them, which therefore we are naturally disposed to make according to the Proportion which the Errors of every kind bear to their respective Faculty: and all this without calling in question the Truth of the Faculties themselves:

selves: This the Bulk of Mankind uncorrupted never do, who receive with all Simplicity those Operations of Nature as they are intended by God: these are the Refinements of Speculative Men who would substitute their own Wisdom in the Room of the Divine. What Errors there were, I said, were of course corrected by the superior Truth of the Faculty respectively, and I add now that the Errors in one Faculty are controul'd by the Truth in another, in such a manner that they are all mutual Checks one upon the other. It happens frequently that a Mistake arises in the Sense, which is convicted by the Reason or the Faith; in another Instance, Reason will submit to the Conviction of Sense or Faith; and again, Faith yields in its turn. Uncorrupted Nature knows when and how far this mutual Submission is fit better than all the Reasoning in the World. The great Difficulty is where any two Faculties in Perfection clash. Suppose a clear Evidence of Sense to be combated by the whole Strength of Faith, *i.e.* suppose I clearly see one thing, and all Mankind affirm that they see another, I don't decide which shall carry it; but from the whole I draw this Conclusion, that as they all alike stand upon a Bottom of Truth, and are all alike subject to accidental Errors, no one of them is to be enslaved to the other; neither are the Decisions of Reason to dictate absolutely to Sense, nor those of Sense to Reason, nor Faith to either.

Now here has lain the Folly of Philosophers, those Innovators of Nature, who observing the Mistakes of Sense and Faith, and how frequently our Passions hurry us out of the Way, have taken Occasion from hence to deify the Reason, and have paid all those Compliments to the Reason of Man which are only due to Reason in Perfection, or the Reason of God. And upon this wrong Principle they argue as all Mad-men do, very consistently that our Perfection consists in the Cultivation of Reason, that nothing is true or carries any Authority

rity but what can approve itself to the Reason; the Reports of Sense are nothing, the Opinion of Mankind is nothing, no Faith or Obedience is due any where but to Reason: The Passions are therefore to be utterly rooted out, because the Wise-man in following them does not explicitly see the Reason: A Father, a Master, a Magistrate are Names that signify nothing in Truth, because they are to be obey'd no further than they are consistent with Reason, by which he means the Reason in himself. He is therefore absolute Lord of himself, he is every Thing, because nothing is any Thing with him any further than it is Reason; he is the only Free-man, he is a King, he is God.

I know very well that all Philosophers don't carry the Matter so high; but where they stop short of this, they fall short of the Principle which I am combating. If they condescend to accept any Benefit from Government, from Religion, from the Passions, it is stolen from another Principle than what they profess; for every Thing that has been said follows consistently upon a Perfection of Reason; Government can be of no use where the Man is absolutely qualified to govern himself. To love or hate, to hope or fear would but disturb the serene State of perfect Reason.

SEE NOW what follows: With infinite Labour and Struggle against Nature, he has at last gone near to break all these 10000 unseen Channels, by which infinite Wisdom had contrived to join one Thing to another, and preserve a mutual Communication between the several Parts; those mysterious Ligaments wrought with the most curious Workmanship that tie the Father to the Son, the Husband to the Wife, the Magistrate to the Subject, the Body to the Soul; that Charm of Nature by which every Thing appears either lovely or great, or Holy amongst Men. And now behold the Wise-man plac'd in the midst of a beautiful World as in a vast Wilderness, cut off from all Communication with
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it, and perfectly free. He looks all round him, and sees Mankind acting upon quite other Principles, seeing and hearing and believing, loving and beloved, honouring and being honoured, *i. e.* in his Sense all trifling and playing the Fool in different Roads: he laughs at all those Amusements, the World is nothing for him, and perhaps, to shew the last Disregard to it, the brave Man kills himself and leaves it; the most dreadful State of Mind to which God can possibly abandon an unhappy Man; he is then become insupportable to himself; nothing but Darkness and Desolation.

AND in Proportion, as he appears a God to himself, he must of Necessity throw off his Reverence for the real God of the Universe, whose Administration in human Affairs from one End to the other is diametrically opposite to his Scheme; all Regard for Men whom he considers as poor contemptible Wretches of a lower Species than himself, if his Reason prompts him to take care of them, 'tis under the same Notion that we provide for our Horses or Dogs, or any Domestick Animal: if, to avoid the Odium of the People, he seems to put on their Notions in Religion or Government, and makes a Profession of Courtesy and Respect to Mankind, then his Life is all one Lye and Inconsistency; for what Principle of his can support such an Esteem? nor can he act this Part so well but that the publick Eye discerns through it, his Pride and Irreligion. These are the fatal Consequences of Reason indulg'd to excess, and not temper'd by the Respect we owe to our other Faculties, to the World, and to God. And if these Consequences don't always appear full grown, it is because Men (as I said before) are happily inconsistent with their Principle. Reason is of great Use, as it is employ'd in correcting the Excesses, and rectifying the wrong Use of our Sense, our Faith, or our Passions; but in return, it does itself as much, full as much, need the salutary Check which it receives from them.

SUPPOSE

SUPPOSE now, that the reasoning Man, after having destroy'd or enfeebled those natural Inclinations, shall at length come to perceive that they, together with the Prepossessiones which of course attend them, tho' not distinctly and explicitly seen by us, are yet really Compendiums (if I may so call them) of Reason, the Results and Conclusions of the highest Wisdom which God has wrought into our Natures. Suppose therefore, that now he shall begin to think it proper to restore them: he has destroy'd the natural Love which he bore to his Children; let him try to create it again by Force of Reasoning. He would not accept of Meat and Drink as Nature prepared him for it by a Stomach, by that hidden Enchantment of Hunger and Thirst; his Reason must be satisfied: it is satisfied: will all the Logick of Man give it again the Perfection with which the Wisdom of God had wrought it? The same is true in Government and Religion; it is dangerous to meddle with the Foundations of Nature; he has cut the Knots, and it is impossible for him, even when he sees the utmost Reason for it, to tie them again.

He complains of Prejudices which enslave the Mind: And indeed on all Sides, which way ever we look, we see nothing else; Nature does almost all her Work by Prejudices: Prejudices for Religion; Prejudices for Virtue, for our Country, for our Family: These Prejudices may obstruct his Reason perhaps, and it is highly fit they should, but they are the Reason of God. If these Prejudices are wrong applied, as they sometimes are, let him give a Reason that shall be strong enough to overcome them: This is the proper Use of Reason; but let him not complain of Prejudice in the whole, and pretend to set us at Liberty from one of the wisest and kindest Laws of God, which directly flows from the most essential Affections of Human Nature.

If we talk of Reason in Perfection, as I said before, and the Liberty that belongs to it, all those Things are useless and absurd Incumbrances upon it, and we had nothing to do but to destroy them all as soon as possible. But as Reason is in Man imperfect, and but one Thing among others fully as essential, the true Liberty of Man must consist in the proper balancing of one of these against another. This is the Artifice of Nature, this the Wisdom of God; by infinite Checks and Controuls we are kept from bursting out on any Side: Did we want any one of these, some other would want its Counterpoise, and soon shew itself by something monstrous and irregular. The best, the wisest of us all, can he answer for himself what he should have been if he had not been happily under those wholesome Restraints, which are so many that every Man in the World is in some measure a Check upon us? All these therefore, bound close upon us by that strong Brace of the Authority of God, which alone can keep the whole firm and unhurt, constitute the Happiness, the Perfection, and the Liberty of Man: And this is the Plan of our most holy Religion. Why have not I Time to say what might be easily said upon this glorious Theme? But I must be very short.

By the Account that has been given of Liberty, it is easily seen where our Slavery lies: We may be enslaved to our own Reason, when not knowing its Bounds, it plays the Tyrant within us, and begets a secret and extravagant Pride, odious to God and Man, and even insufferable to ourselves. We may be enslaved to our Sense when we are so wholly possess'd by present Objects that we can't give to absent Things the Regard which they justly demand from us. Our Faith may enslave us, and does so when we give too much to the Authority of Man, by placing in him Infallibility, and an absolute Right to Obedience. Our Passions enslave us when we either love or hate, hope or fear enormously,

mously, and beyond the true Proportion of the Objects about which they are employ'd; and lastly, which was the fifth Thing mention'd some time since, we may be enslaved to some unknown Principles which may hurry and bewitch us into all manner of Extravagancies. From this Slavery of every kind the Son of God has effectually set us free by the Obedience of Faith, and by that has justly merited the high Title of the Saviour and Redeemer of Mankind. — We now suppose the Truths and Duties of the Gospel dictated by God to be the same which our own Reason, were it perfect, would prescribe to us, resulting from an infinite View of Things laid together, and exhibited to the Faith. The Reason has the same Perfection in itself as if it were our own, but it is the Reason of God: Every thing that we do upon this Principle is absolutely perfect, but it is a Perfection which is the Gift and Grace of God: Virtue is no longer in this View a Creature of our own, a Thing to be proud of, but to be thankful for; *i. e.* it is Virtue join'd with Humility and the Love of God. Considering the Imperfection of our Reason, whatever we do from that only, must necessarily retain the Imperfection of its Fountain, can be done but with Half-views, and cannot possibly be compleated but upon the Christian Scheme. Hence it is that Jesus Christ, through whom the whole Grace of God is convey'd to Man, is the Light and the Truth which only can set us free: He came not to destroy Reason, for he is Reason itself substantiated, but to fulfil and compleat it, and by taking off all the Pride and Tyranny of it to render it dutiful to God and conversible with Men. — He has rescued us from the excessive Power of the Sense, not by disputing the Reality of its Perceptions, for he address'd his Person, his Miracles, and his Discourses to it, but by opening to its View a larger Scene, and teaching it to form its Judgment not from a narrow Compass that was perpetually

tually shifting, but from an immense World of Things that continued the same. And thus where- as if we had been left wholly under the Guidance of our Sense, we should have changed our Measures with every Change of Prospect, being firmly anchor'd (if I may so say) in that eternal State, we are preserv'd steady in all the Fluctuations of this World. — The same may be said with regard to the Passions, which, far from rooting out, he has only directed towards their proper Objects. He has found out the Secret of overcoming the World through the same Avenues by which it formerly overcame us. We are allow'd still to love and hope Good, to fear Evil of every kind; but he has pointed those Passions towards the Place where all the Treasures of Good and Evil are laid up. He has found an Object for them exactly commensurate to them. Whatever Reason we have to love the World, we have still more to love God, because that very Reason, together with every other that can possibly create Love, is comprehended in him. Heaven is not something wholly different from the Happiness we enjoy here, but it is the Sum of all Happiness, in which this is consider'd according to its Proportion. The Terrors that this World can offer to us are no otherwise different from those of the other, than as these are but some Streamings from an Ocean, some Tinctures of Evil from that Cup which is in the Hand of the Lord.

It has offended the Delicacy of a fine Author of the present Age, that God should have any thing in him that can create Fear, not considering enough that it is fit that God should have in every thing the Preeminence. To our Reason he is the first Truth; he is the first Article of our Faith; to our Love he is supremely aimable, and to our Fear, being offended, he ought to be the most terrible of all Things. Since we possess all these Faculties, he must possess something that shall perfectly answer to them all. Were we indeed wholly destitute of

this Passion of Fear, God might safely want those Attributes that affect it; but since we have it, and must have it as long as we have any Notion of Evil, shall we fear every Thing but God, be afraid of offending Man, and not afraid of offending God? Shall our Reason, our Faith, our Love, draw us towards him, and our Fear be set at loose to frighten us from him? In such a Case, considering the Predominancy of this Passion in our Nature, who can answer for the Consequence? But as Things are order'd, every Principle within us is carried to Perfection, and taught by our Religion to act in concert, whilst our Reason in the Cause of God triumphs over the weaker Reasons which would appear to combat him, and our Faith in God overcomes the weaker Portions of Faith which we place in Men; our Love and Fear of God lead in Captivity the smaller Loves and Fears which we employ on the Creature, and all together join their Forces in one Direction in supporting the Prerogative of God, and the Happiness and Liberty of Man. — If it were a Breach upon our Liberty to fear God, if it were mercenary to hope for Heaven, yet if we must hope and fear at all, certainly those Passions can never be so rightly applied as here: We can never serve with more Honour, nor for a more noble Reward; but when we consider that those same Things, which, as they are proposed to our Hopes and Fears, carry the Notions of Recompence, are in a Way of Reason everlasting and necessary Consequences of our well or evil doing, thus we no longer act from a View of Recompence, but from the highest Reason; thus God no longer threatens nor rewards, but only mercifully reveals to us the necessary Fruit of our Doings, and gives us to act with perfect Liberty.

As to our Faith, besides what has been said already, I ought to shew, and was prepared to do it, that God has the same Advantage with regard to Faith as every other where; that he is supremely
intitled

intitled to it, as well as to the Acknowledgment of our Reason, that the Foundations of it are as perfect in their kind, and that it is fully as impossible to withstand the Evidences; and consequently that to disbelieve here, argues as monstrous and as dangerous a Depravity in its kind as to reason wrong; that as in Reasoning to deny the Existence of Deity secretly undermines all Reason, and leaves it without Foundation, so it is impossible to assign a Foundation for any Faith at all, if the Faith of Deity be destroy'd. I should have shew'd that he has the same supreme Advantage in speaking to the Faith of Mankind, that the Testimony of God is of Necessity greater than the Testimony of Man, and that Christianity has this Testimony of God, and therefore that we can deny our Faith to it upon no Principles but what will much more strongly conclude against believing any thing at all.

BUT all this being suppos'd, because I cannot now enter into the Proof of it, I shall only now observe, that here especially seems to be center'd the Notion of Christian Liberty; that by this Faith in God all smaller Considerations are absorbed in that Perfection of Reason which is carried in this divine Faith. In the Christian Scheme we honour and obey our Parents and Governors in Obedience to God. The Authority of God, at the same time that it binds upon us the Duties which we owe to Men, limits them, and makes them Part of that first and comprehensive Duty which we owe to God, and so effectually guards against the Excess into which otherwise they might run. — They are much mistaken, however, who think that this is to be done by destroying Reason and natural Affections, and the Authority of Man, and substituting in their room this Obedience to God. We should make but coarse Work of it, did we eat and drink, and love our Children, and obey our Parents or Magistrates for no Reason, but with an explicate View to God only: No, those very Affections, the

Exercise of our Reason, Submission to Authority, within their proper Bounds, are all Part of that Obedience which we owe to God: To give to the Poor from a Compassion or Generosity of Temper, as far as those Affections are right, is as much Obedience to God as if we gave ever so much with a View to the Command; for these are all the Laws of God, and, far from being destroy'd by the Christian Law, receive a new Sanction from it. We must now honour our Parents, and be obedient to Authority, not only for the Reason that is carried in those natural Dispositions, not only from the Reasonableness of the Thing itself, as it appears to us, both which Arguments yet are very great, but from the Command of God signified to our Faith, *i.e.* for other Reasons unknown to us, which fill up what was defective in our own, and constitute, as I have said before, the Christian Perfection and Liberty. We must love Man still, but we must love God more; we must obey Man, but we must obey God rather.

LASTLY, Upon the Christian Scheme we are freed from the Tyranny of that unknown Principle within us, which unrestrain'd hurries and bewitches us into the greatest Extravagancies. Not only many of our Actions are wholly unaccountable, but there is something unaccountable in all of them. There is every where a Mixture of this unknown, which therefore we are greatly concern'd to guard against. This, as it betrays us to Evil, is, in the Language of the sacred Writings, the Devil, the Father and Author of all Evil, Evil itself impersonated, Evil alive, vigilant, crafty, insinuating, malicious; the most perfect Object of that Fear which is join'd with Hatred that all Nature can furnish, for it comprehends every thing that is shocking and detestable. This dreadful Being, the Jest of little-minded Men, is represented ever busy in infusing Evil, and poisoning our Good; his invisible Arrows are for ever flying abroad, and no way to be repell'd but by the Shield

Shield of Faith. This Shield covers all that Part of us that we must of necessity leave exposed; the Danger here does by the Supposition lie without the Precincts of any human Caution, and nothing but an invisible Assistance can guard us against an unseen Enemy. Our Security therefore lies in this, that he that is in us is, stronger than he that is in the World. We must be sensible of our own Insufficiency, and rest ourselves under the Shadow of the Almighty, who we are taught firmly to believe is able and willing to protect us; and this only Charm will most effectually secure us.

I shall have said all, in an imperfect Manner, that I can now be allow'd to say concerning the Advantage of Faith, by which the Wisdom of God has chosen to set us free beyond the Reason of Man, when I have just added this Observation, that if Reason only could give us Liberty, but some very few could be free, a Philosopher here and there, and all the rest of the World must lie under Bondage unredeemable, and in fact no considerable Part of Mankind has ever been influenc'd this Way; but by this Method of Faith Jesus Christ is qualified to be the Redeemer of all Mankind, the Great and Small, the Scholar, and the Unlearn'd, Man and Woman being equally susceptible of the Grounds of Faith, and the Grace of God. I proceed,

Thirdly, To mention two or three of the Abuses which have arisen from a Liberty ill understood; and the first I shall mention shall be a very early one, where Liberty is abused for an Occasion to the Flesh, *i. e.* is brought to countenance an immoderate Love of present Pleasures, to justify us in departing from the establish'd Ways of Happiness which the Wisdom of God and Man has mark'd out for us. This Notion of Liberty proceeds from the utmost Poverty of Mind; for allowing Liberty to consist in the free Enjoyment of Pleasure (and indeed it can never be separated from it) this is what the Laws of Religion and Government have
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ever had in view to provide for; one for everlasting Pleasures, the Beatitude and supreme Happiness of Man, *i. e.* absolute Pleasure or absolute Happiness; the other for the Pleasures or Happiness of Life, both which are ordinarily to be found in the same Way. These Rules are form'd, if I may so express myself, upon the most perfect Calculations of God and Man, wherein every Pleasure has been duly consider'd and allow'd for. The Man we are talking of has not a Soul wide enough to take in so large a Compass; a few Years are a Burden too much for him to think on; his Pleasures are the Pleasures of a Month, of a Week, of a Day, or even of a Moment. Hence arises a whole Set of Principles corresponding: Friendship, as it is not founded upon any Views of Life, does not require the Cements of Worth and Virtue, it needs not be made of such lasting Stuff, it is enough that it serves the Purposes of those Pleasures. Justice, Honesty, Humanity, and all publick Virtues are shrivell'd into a kind of Honour, a noble Word corrupted to mean that Bond which ties together such Friends. Hence it is that a most profligate Man may be a very good Friend, he may be a Man of Honour that has given up all Pretensions to common Justice, and one that has thrown off Humanity, and perhaps natural Affection, may still be a generous good-natur'd Man. Hence a plain honest Man who labours to fulfil all the Duties of Life, is a stupid servile Animal; the Work of Life is the greatest of Drudgeries, except Religion, which proceeds upon Principles still larger, and more removed from his narrow Understanding. Now see the Consequence: As Knavery is the Gain of a few Days, but corrupts the Foundation which is to support us throughout, so every unlawful Pleasure eats into the Enjoyments of Life, and sucks out all the Happiness which can render it agreeable. If Pleasure is to be found no where but in those Excesses, what remains of our Time, which must

must of Necessity be far the greater Part, must be Misery and Vexation; if Looseness be Liberty, all the rest must of course be Slavery: And thus this happy, this free Man for a few Hours, is cursed and enslaved for Life, and damn'd for ever.

A Second Abuse of Liberty, is that in my Text, where it is used, in Opposition to Government, to cover a Spirit of Pride, Envy, or Maliciousness. I have said something before to shew that Government, in the general Nature of it, has an Understanding proportion'd to its Power. It is evident that whoever are call'd by God to this high Office, are by that Call authorized to summon to their Succour the whole Wisdom of a Nation; thither are directed all Petitions, Remonstrances, Counsels from every Member of the State, *i. e.* the Understanding and even Feeling of a People is all center'd there, and comes forth in Laws adapted to the several Occasions and Exigencies which create them. And it is further certain, since Government has received a fresh Accession of Authority by Revelation, that wherever the Sovereign Power and Legislature of a Nation is lodged by God, together with that Portion of Authority he imparts to it, at the same time, by Ways that we can't explain, some Portion of the Spirit of Wisdom to direct its Counsels, for otherwise here would be an Obedience required without a Reason to support it. Upon this Bottom every Thing is consistent, and we obey Government because it is reasonable to obey it, and consequently according to the Notion of Liberty before laid down, we are free in our Obedience, and really enslaved to something or other when we refuse it. Accordingly there has been ever acknowledged something sacred in the Persons of Princes, a kind of a divine Cloud hovering round their Heads, to which we are naturally prompted to pay a Veneration, which is upon the whole proportion'd to the Reason that supports it.

But yet, as it is impossible to suppose on one Side
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the Grounds of absolute Authority, it is impossible on the other to suppose an absolute Obedience: There are Times when every Thing that is human admits Corruption: A Government therefore is sometimes corrupted, and then it becomes the Part of Liberty to withstand the Corruption. The Wisdom of our Constitution has particularly provided that there shall be Controuls upon the Abuse of Power, and, far from doing wrong, a Representative of the People will betray the Trust reposed in him, if he does not boldly and firmly oppose any Breach upon their Rights, any Innovation that would destroy the just Ballance establish'd between Prince and People. But at the same Time we must not talk for Liberty upon Principles that will destroy all Government, and the Respect that is due to it; we must have especial Care that we don't profane that Name and Cause, by prostituting it to serve our Pride, or Envy, or Malice. As Government is sometimes corrupted, so on the other Hand it is no uncommon Thing to see the proudest and most imperious of Men talk loud for Liberty, by which they must mean a Liberty to do what they please, a Liberty to be Tyrants themselves, and accordingly are so, as far as their Power extends to their Domesticks and Dependents. Where there is any reasonable Jealousy of Ambition, or Envy, or Resentment, or any undue Motive, not all the smart Talk in the World for Liberty will go farther than to divert that little Malice which dwells upon the Surface of the Soul against every Thing that is eminent; it will raise a Laugh and a Jest, but it can never move the Ground of the Heart. To do that, we want the Man, whom *Virgil* describes, *Pietate Gravem ac Meritis*; he must be free within before he can be qualified to decide upon the Liberty without.

THE Third and last Abuse of Liberty that I shall mention, shall be in Matters of Religion. This is at present the Favourite Topick, to such a Degree, that

that it's hardly safe to speak of Liberty with Freedom. By Virtue of this Principle a loose raw Mind, which needs all the Bandage of Authority to keep it tight, is left to its full Swing; and a young Man, perhaps, yet of an Age in which the Law wisely won't truit him with the Government of himself, thinks himself qualified to judge decisively upon the Administration of God, and the Wisdom of Ages; and accordingly the first Principle he sets out upon, is to throw off all Authority of God and Man; his own Reason only shall judge for him: And thus, without any Examination at all, he has already determin'd a Point of the vastest Importance, a Point so great that all the Duties we owe to God and Man depend upon it. For if no Regard is to be had to the Administration of Things, if no Faith is due to the general Understanding, what reasonable Foundation is there left to support the Honour and Respect, and Obedience that we owe them?

BUT, perhaps, I do him wrong; it is not without Examination: He has examin'd, and is furnish'd with many Examples of popular Errors and national Absurdities; he can be eloquent upon the Blunders and Contradictions of general Councils and Synods, and Convocations, &c. And he is so far right, that the wisest of Men are subject to Error, that the largest Assemblies have no just Pretension to Infallibility, because it is absolutely incommunicable to any Creature. The best, the wisest, the greatest Bodies of Men have erred, and are you then, young Man, infallible? They have done some Things weakly, but do you all Things wisely? They have contradicted themselves once or twice in a Century, but don't you many Times every Week, or every Day of your Life? Without all Doubt, if Infallibility were to be placed any where, we ought with the *Romanists* to place it in the general Sense of Mankind, rather than in the Understanding of every single Man; for tho' either is absurd, yet this is infinitely more so: But why must we run mad any Way?

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Because there is no Infallibility in any Society of Men, is there therefore no Authority, no Weight in their Judgment? Full as well may we deny any Authority to a Parent or civil Magistrate, because whole Volumes might be fill'd with Instances where they have commanded wrong? All those Instances, were they ten times as many, would not still be equivalent to that one great Truth which is contain'd in the Obedience we pay them. If we were to enumerate all the Diseases incident to us, 'twould make a large Catalogue; and endless would be the History of all the Distempers that ever have happen'd; and yet were we to take Mankind all round, we should perhaps find a Month's Health to the Sickness of a Day. So much does the general Course of Things preponderate the Exceptions made to it: And thus, in this Case is the Truth of Authority the general Course, and the Errors of it Exceptions.

BUT the Misfortune lies here: A Man happens to have large Acquaintance in the Vices of the Town, or the Corruptions of the Age; thence he gains depraved Notions of the whole; these he feeds by Companions or Books, that are ever instilling into him those Poisons and Deformities of Nature; so that by the Time he is compleated, were his Mind to be dissected, it would be found full fraught with Falshoods, Rogueries, Tricks, Priest-craft, Hurricane and Confusion. This is his Idea of Nature, and upon this Bottom the Disposition of Mankind to believe and obey, must, as it does, appear ridiculous to him: For the Affairs of the World go along upon a general Supposition of Truth and Honesty, and Beauty and Order, and he goes upon the Scheme of Falshood, Roguery and Confusion. The World supposes a good Power presiding, and a wise God directing Affairs with as much Perfection as the necessary Order of Things will admit; the cunning Man either leaves all at random, or else places the Devil at the Head of Things; and yet after all, in order to keep some Measures with

with the World, he is forced to cramp his Words and Actions to some Conformity with it: And which I pray you is the free Man? he whose Thinking and Doing go hand in hand, both alike obedient to Authority, as far as it is reasonable, and no further (for thus far only, upon the whole, has God disposed Men to obey;) or he whose Thoughts and Actions are ever contradictory, who would do one Thing, but must do another? — But this Force is the Thing which he complains of; and great Tragedies are rais'd upon the Persecution of Truth, and the Discouragement which Power has put upon Reasoning: If a Thing be reasonable, it will appear so upon a fair Examination; why then is it not left to that Test? And I agree that if we were govern'd by nothing but Reason, all Application ought to be made to that Faculty, and there it has too all imaginable Advantage; but as we are constituted, it ought to have an Advantage as well to every Part of us. See how the Matter stands in God; his Being is the first Truth, and therefore has the greatest Advantage to the Reason of any other, and his Rights consequently are the most reasonable: but does he leave it to that? has he not infinite Power too to support them? and indeed where should Power be used but in the Cause of Truth? Thus at the same time that Truth combats Error, will Power combat the Pride, the Stubbornness, the Perversity of the Passions; and for the same Reason that infinite Truth is join'd with infinite Power, ought every Truth to be countenanc'd by a Power proportion'd to it. To hear some People talk, one would imagine that God had himself given abroad this Truth, but that he had left the Distribution of his Power (the Dignity of this Place won't permit me to speak it full) to any thing else; for how otherwise should it come to pass that Power should always be employ'd in bearing down the Truth? that one of the Attributes of God should be in perpetual War with another? It is not so: There is a Balance in the

Hand of God, in which all Things in Heaven and Earth are weighed; out of which are dealt the several Shares, as of all other Things, so of Power too in the wisest Proportions. Power, upon the whole, is employ'd to protect Truth; it defends Virtue, Justice, Religion, Government, Order, and all the Reason that is comprehended in them. Sometimes indeed it is overstrain'd, sometimes it is wrong applied, and then so far it discourages Truth; but this is an accidental Abuse of a good Thing, and contrary to the general Course.

BUT it is said our Reason ought not to be influenc'd; there is no Merit in receiving Truth any other Way than by the Force of Reason: But suppose that Truth, at the same time that it is very reasonable, is very useful too; suppose that God is not only the most demonstrable, but the most important Truth to our own Happiness; suppose that Jesus Christ is not only a Truth, but a Truth necessary to our Perfection and Salvation, what shall we do in this Case? Must Truth lay aside all its Good, and become an insignificant Thing, that we may be able to reason upon it coolly, and with Indifference? and, for fear the Reason should be bribed, must we leave nothing in it worth our Acceptance. Now, upon the Supposition above made, there is no Harm in all this; On the contrary, it is the utmost Goodness in God, since they all tend to the same Point, to make use of every Advantage of Interest, as well as Reason, to draw us to our Happiness, for that is the Issue of all; but we insist upon the Point of Honour, will receive it in a way of Reason only, and make our Salvation our own Work: On the contrary, God appears in the whole Course of his Dealings with us, not so much to have consulted the Honour of our Reason, as the Honour of his own Administration; not so much our Merit, as the Glory of his own Grace; not our Pride but our Happiness; to which it is indispensably necessary that we be humble and thankful.

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BUT where Power is abused, (for I have acknowledged that sometimes it is so) has Truth no Way to raise its Head? Yes, when the Fulness of Times is come which the Father hath reserv'd in his own Hand, when Power is come to a certain Pitch of universal Degeneracy, and God hath his strange Work to do upon the Earth, then the Spirit of the Lord descends upon some chosen Instruments of his Providence; inspires them with a Force superior to all the Strength of the World, which enables them to declare the Truth boldly, and to do and suffer for it gloriously. And this is the Way by which, if any great Revolution is to be effected, God has chosen to effect it. It is not by sitting at Home, and reasoning at our Ease, and expecting to be secured, before we dare declare ourselves: It is an evident Proof of the little Value we put upon a Truth, when it does not in our own Judgment countervail a few Conveniences of Life, especially when we are so nobly rewarded both in the present Sense and the future Expectations of Glory. If it be not worth a little Suffering of our own, can we think it worth the Introduction into the World, with all the Evils that of course attend a Revolution? To complain therefore of a few Hardships which now and then attend Truth, is to complain of the only Method by which Providence has chosen to make it prevail. Had the Apostles, before they enter'd into any Kingdom, insisted upon a safe Conduct, before they ventur'd to preach Jesus Christ, desired the Laws to be suspended, what would become of Christianity? These are the Principles upon which a necessary Reformation is to be justified; these the Methods by which it is to be effected.

AND as to our Brethren the Protestant Dissenters, those who cannot be perswaded to sacrifice gloriously a few small Scruples (for such themselves seem generally now to think them) to the great Truth of publick Order, where the Differences are small, they are intitled to the Toleration: they enjoy so much Indulgence

indulgence as is consistent with the necessary Encouragement of the Establish'd Religion, which can never be given up, but with the most fatal Consequences; they need not seek Shelter under Principles which bring them upon a Level with the most abandoned of Men, for such is the Right of judging for ourselves, which either justifies nothing, or justifies every thing alike; the wildest Excesses of Thought, or Action, except it be supposed that there is a Right of Thinking, and not of Acting according to our Thoughts.

But it seems it is in Religion only that we have this Right, for in Points of Morality we ought to think truly; we can claim no Privilege of thinking Murder, Adultery, or Perjury, innocent Things: Any one that should advance those Doctrines would justly fall under the Publick Censure. But why this Difference? The Reason is plain, because Murder, or Perjury, are things that concern our civil Interests: but God and his Worship, may either be or not be, without any Consequence to the World. This is the plain Tendency of the Distinction; and in truth, if Religion be a Thing so wholly of another World, that it has no Influence upon this, the Magistrate has no Concern in it at all. But if it be still, what it ever has been, the first Bond and Tie of all Duty, the strongest Cement of all Order and Government; if it be still a Truth, as it was three thousand Years ago here as well as in *Judea*, that the Practice of Religion draws after it all Civil Prosperity, and the Neglect of it the utmost Curse of God upon a Nation; if Jesus Christ, when he fulfill'd and perfected Religion by adding to it the Sanctions of Eternity, destroy'd no Truth, no Consequence of it upon Temporal Affairs, but let it remain still as useful to the World as it was before; if this be true, I say, then the Magistrate is still deeply concern'd in protecting Religion, and discountenancing and punishing whatever would destroy it.

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THE contrary Scheme goes upon the Supposition of Religion being a Thing indifferent, and tends to beget a fatal Indifferency towards it. Hence it becomes a genteel thing to sit loose in this Point, for fear of a Mistake to be ever open to Reason or Drollery against it, to feel no kindly Warmth of Affection in its Favour: And because sometimes People have been ridiculously or extravagantly zealous, and some have carried their Passions too high for it, there must be a mortal Stagnation of all Affection. As if, because we have sometimes Storms, we ought to have no Winds; because the Love of our Country, its Laws, and Liberties, betrays us frequently into Wars and Mischiefs of every kind, therefore our Country deserves no Love at all. The Mischiefs that Religion has done, are a Demonstration of its Importance; for Nothing else has Interest enough with Mankind to engage them to it; and accordingly it is universally true, that every thing that is most valuable, has accidentally created the greatest Evils. Hence it is, that the Duties of Religion are only a Matter of Decency; its most solemn Institutions bare Convenience, and that Convenience so small that it ought to submit not only to every Degree of worldly Interest, but to our Frolick and Wantonness, the better deciding of a Wager, or any Thing still more insignificant. O God! that *Fas & Nefas*, Words that heretofore imported the strictest Obligation upon the Soul, the last Right and bounden Duty of Man, should now under Christianity mean no more than Convenient and Not Convenient.

AND what has been the Consequence of all this Coldness? Why that, which must necessarily be, when once the great Bond of Duty that holds all together is burst, every smaller one cracks one after the other. It is not Duty, not that natural Veneration, and Affection, which should pass between a People, and the Father of it, that binds our Civil Obedience; no kindly Prepossessions in favour of

of Government, but on the contrary a Thirst and Greediness after every little Novelty that makes against it: We obey, because we find something convenient in it; and from the same Convenience it is that we pay any Respect to our Parents; and in some polite Company it would be treated as an old-fashion'd thing to mention Duty, or Honour, or Gratitude to those that gave us Being. Every Man's own private Gains, his private Pleasures, his Vanities, his Humours, his Trifles, are now the only essential Things. But in the mean time what can assure us in the Possession of any thing at all? Will every Man's private Reason fill the Place of that Eternal Wisdom which upholds the whole? When publick Justice, when everlasting Righteousness have no Force, will Honour, that thin Web of Man's Contexture, hold us? If we have thrown off the Authority of God, shall we long preserve a Respect to that little Idol, which we set up every Man in his own Heart? It cannot be.

God Almighty grant that we may seriously reflect upon these Things in Season. To Him Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be given all Honour, and Glory, Now and Ever.

F I N I S.

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THIS Sermon was spoken no further than to that Paragraph under the third Abuse, which begins thus; *But this Force is the Thing which he complains of.*

